

STARTING POINT:

REPORT FROM THE LOUISIANA RECOVERY AND REBUILDING CONFERENCE

Submitted November 22, 2005

More than 650 citizens, community leaders, architects, planners, engineers, business people and public officials gathered in New Orleans November 10-12 for the Louisiana Recovery and Rebuilding Conference, the starting point for the planning and the rebuilding of damaged parts of the state that have fallen victim to the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The three-day program marked the beginning of a process, directed by the Louisiana Recovery Authority, which brings together a wide range of national and state leaders, citizens, and design experts to help develop a body of planning principles, and ultimately parish-by-parish rebuilding plans, that will guide long-range recovery efforts.

The conference was presented by The American Institute of Architects, in collaboration with the American Planning Association, at the request of Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco and the Louisiana Recovery Authority. It was co-sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Society of Civil Engineers. In addition to the sponsoring organizations, the conference received support from *AmericaSpeaks*, a nonprofit group that coordinated facilitation and instant feedback, and from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The conference was a model of constructive, transparent dialogue between experts and citizens. It was the first collaborative opportunity for Louisiana residents to discuss long-term statewide recovery efforts, goals and planning.

The human and physical devastation in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast region is dire. The passage of time does not lessen the calamity, but only deepens the suffering, the misery and the destruction.

This extraordinary American disaster requires an extraordinary American response.

Confidence Through Commitment

Throughout the Louisiana Recovery and Rebuilding Conference, a series of policy goals and planning and design principles emerged that are intended to inform future rebuilding efforts. These goals and principles cover a range of issues including community livability, sustainability, economic development, infrastructure design, historic preservation, technology, risk mitigation, health, public safety, and environmental protection.

The recovery and rebuilding of Louisiana provides a historic opportunity to bring triumph out of tragedy for the people and communities devastated by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. With commitment, powered by a unified voice, it can be done.

In addition to specific planning principles and redevelopment goals, overarching themes emerged:

Unify: Public officials, civic leaders and citizens of Louisiana must speak with one voice, especially when presenting its case to Congress and the agencies of the federal government for assistance. The urgent need for a massive national commitment to the rebuilding and recovery of hurricane-ravaged areas, as enunciated by President George W. Bush in his September 15, 2005 address to the nation from Jackson Square, must be underscored with bold and deliberate action.

Cooperate: The private and public sectors must work together, both selflessly and creatively, in developing and implementing rebuilding and recovery plans. Parishes and municipalities must put aside old divisions and eliminate barriers to regional planning and cooperation. Federal, state and local agencies must remove unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles and political impediments to taking the required action steps.

Protect: There is an urgent need for a clear, specific commitment on the part of the federal government to devote the resources necessary to protect the south Louisiana region from future hurricanes, flooding and coastal erosion – and to do so without delay. Levee protection and coastal restoration are national environmental, economic and security imperatives. These and other infrastructure systems were critical concerns long before Katrina and Rita. The recent hurricanes and their unspeakable devastation have only spotlighted, and exacerbated, the risks and dangers of inadequate protection. Recovery efforts must be all-encompassing to protect the public's health, safety and welfare and they must factor in system interdependencies. A commitment to the long-term protection of the people and the environment of southern Louisiana is a prerequisite to establishing the public confidence that is needed to begin the process of rebuilding and reinvestment.

Preserve: Throughout the rebuilding process, Louisiana's unique architecture, history, cultural heritage and diversity must be preserved. The pressure to rebuild must not be used as an excuse to destroy salvageable historic structures. Preservation of the historic treasures of Louisiana's built environment is vital to the state's successful future.

Rebuild: Community redevelopment and the rebuilding of local economies is a massive and necessary undertaking. Temporary solutions cannot substitute for long-term rebuilding based on sound design and planning. Areas that cannot be safely redeveloped must not go to waste; they must be used to enhance the life and the environment of nearby communities, whether as parks, wetlands or natural preserves.

Improve: We must learn from the mistakes of the past. Visionary planning, quality design and the innovative utilization of new technologies are essential. Rebuilding housing, schools, health care facilities, public transportation, drinking and wastewater systems, parks, playgrounds, drainage and infrastructure – and other necessities of community life and commerce – affords an opportunity to make things better by doing things better. Where neighborhoods must rise anew and public services must be reestablished, high standards of excellence, equity and performance must apply.

The Conference Process

Planners, designers, architects and citizens of the hurricane-stricken communities all came together to share their dreams and visions of recovery and rebuilding. They talked, they listened and they collaborated on an emerging series of goals and principles to guide the recovery and rebuilding of the affected regions.

Among those attending the conference, 71% had suffered damage to their homes, and 7% lost homes entirely. These participants are no longer residing in their communities, with 35% displaced somewhere else in the state and 31% living outside Louisiana.

Participants at the conference have deep roots in Louisiana, with 68% living in the state more than 20 years, and another 6% with 11 to 20 years of residence. They included a wide range of citizens as well as leaders in civic, community, church or faith-based organizations; public officials and government employees; educators and school professionals; healthcare workers; corporate and business representatives; architects, engineers, designers and other planning professionals.

To make sure that each conference participant had an opportunity to fully voice his or her views, participants were seated in groups of about 10 at more than 60 round tables at the New Orleans Marriott hotel. At each table was a facilitator—a professionally trained discussion leader from the sponsoring organizations and *AmericaSpeaks* equipped with a laptop computer networked to a computer system linking all tables, creating an internal e-mail network. Each facilitator led and stimulated the discussion encouraging each person at the table to ask questions or offer ideas. The facilitator then entered the questions and brief comments into the computer as a permanent record.

All 60+ tables were connected by computer to a “theme team” table, where there were a dozen volunteers with diverse backgrounds, including, engineering, architecture, urban planning, public policy and historic preservation. Their mission was to absorb and synthesize an array of information and opinion.

The theme team correlated the proposals and placed them into a visible representation of the themes with the most widespread appeal. They were fed back to the audience by display on a large screen, and the facilitators asked the participants to select their top choices with the keypad. Each participant wielded a separate keypad and selected his or her top choices. The deliberations were in real time. Nobody had to wait days for a

transcript of the discussions. And the deliberations and choice of top themes were transparent.

Participants could see the goals and principles that were percolating from within the room. They shared their viewpoints and then through the keypads provided instant feedback on how they judged the choices. This is how the core goals and principles listed in this report, for both the state and for the parishes, were developed.

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Goals and Principles for Action

After three days of deliberation, discussion and exchange of ideas, these core policy goals and planning principles emerged from the conference:

Create infrastructure that supports recovery by restoring confidence, enhancing quality of life, and withstanding future disasters by:

- Category 5 protection—levees, restored wetlands, and an independent authority to ensure ongoing maintenance and funding.
- Improved services including communications, energy, and other key elements.
- Sustainable, equitable, and transparent approaches to rebuilding and future development.

Promote economic growth that benefits everyone through:

- A diverse economy encompassing traditional and emerging industries, supported by both respect for the region's historic character and innovative funding strategies (incentives, and public/private partnerships).
- A foundation for growth including quality education and job training, housing, transportation, and other key elements available regardless of income.
- Equity that includes living wages and career tracks, benefits everyone in the region, and provides long-term economic opportunity.

Provide public services that enhance quality of life for everyone through:

- High quality education at every level as the center for rebuilding communities.
- Regional transit, coordinated with opportunities for community development.
- Great parks and other public spaces that serve communities and support flood control.

Pursue policies that promote a healthy environment and healthy people by:

- Deciding where to rebuild, investing in protecting these areas, and dedicating remaining areas to natural uses.
- Sustainable approaches to every facet of rebuilding—energy, transit, land use, building design, and other elements.

- Walkable communities that through their planning and design promote healthy lifestyles.

Plan and design communities that advance livability by:

- Preserving the best of the past as the core for rebuilding while anticipating future needs.
- Mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhoods that foster diversity and social equity.
- Smart growth at an urban, suburban, and rural scale that balances recovery and sustainability.

These proposals for the affected areas were developed during the first two days. On the third day, the participants turned to their own parishes to offer local and more detailed ideas as principles for rebuilding:

Orleans Parish

Unified voice

- Mayor and Governor's rebuilding commissions should collaborate and speak with one voice.
- Enhance regional collaboration.

Infrastructure (physical and governmental)

- Create citizen input forum so everyone can participate.
- Build flood protection to Category 5 levels.
- Consolidate redundant government agencies and law enforcement departments.
- Change city charter so City Council cannot overrule City Planning Commission.

Economic Growth

- Encourage renters to return by providing incentives for high quality rental units.

Public Services

- Build mass transit including rapid rail to downtown airport and to Baton Rouge and neighboring parishes with community development nodes.
- Develop a world class park and playground system.
- Provide high quality education at all levels using new models and paradigms.
- Incorporate community and cultural centers into public schools.

Public Policies

- Inventory neighborhoods and determine immediately where rebuilding should and should not occur based on safety, occupancy, demographics, utilities and insurability.
- Provide neighborhood health care access and clinics.
- Adopt design policies at the local and state levels for transportation infrastructure.
- Set specific targets for reduction of bicycle and pedestrian crashes and incidents including bike lanes.

Planning and Design

- Complete and implement the New Orleans Master Plan.
- Use Main Street and smart growth principles to redevelop St. Claude and Rampart corridors as mixed-income and mixed-use to serve adjoining neighborhoods.
- Restore and rehabilitate existing buildings and neighborhoods, local and neighborhood businesses.
- Respect and maintain the architecture, cultural heritage and human scale design of traditional New Orleans neighborhoods.
- Historic preservation will be a guiding principle in all aspects of regeneration.
- Reduce the concentration of poverty by building and repairing in-fill housing for low-income residents.
- Focus higher density, mixed-use development downtown.
- Use smart growth principles to locate compact higher density development in appropriate locations.

St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes

Infrastructure (physical and governmental)

- Close the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) channel which is greatly eroded.
- Develop natural wildlife preserve in MRGO channel area for children and families.

Economic Growth

- Promote St. Bernard's different cultures (such as Islandos).
- Develop industries within St. Bernard to develop our natural resources such as exporting seafood.

Public Services

- Establish a public transportation system connecting St. Bernard with New Orleans and Jefferson.

Public Policies

- Reestablish the Barrier Islands for fishing, bird sanctuary and hurricane protection.

St. Tammany Parish

Unified voice

- Need a regional planning approach:
 - Insist on full partnership within the regions in regards to rebuilding efforts, taxation, etc.
 - Institute continuous planning process.
 - Investigate consolidated parish government and consolidate regional services.

- Create inclusionary zoning ordinances.
- Lobby/secure from the federal government funding for 10-year plan.
- Improve regional approach to planning by establishing a regional planning commission that meets and acts beyond transportation.
- Eliminate territorial discrimination by including more people in planning.

Infrastructure (physical and governmental)

- Provide improved services:
 - Relocate electric delivery system underground.
 - Restore the damaged non-profit organizations to ensure a full continuum of health and human services.
 - Heal attitudes toward an honest, diverse community on the north shore.

Economic Growth

- Institute job training with an emphasis on construction clean-up.

Public Services

- Need additional transportation systems:
 - Understand the link between transportation and land use.
 - Improve roadways with state support – more, better and reconsider existing planned transportation based on growth projection.
 - Implement parish’s 10-year plan which includes east-west connections.
 - Educate people about existing transportation/transit options.

Public Policies

- Educate community on the benefits of smart growth principles.

Planning and Design

- Utilize smart growth principles and provide a wider range of housing choice:
 - Rethink lot size requirements with regards to affordable housing.
 - Establish urban growth boundaries with agricultural principles.
 - Preserve green space and create boundaries between wetlands/coastal area.
 - Build (don’t just talk) mixed-income housing.
 - Design and build new “town centers” in unincorporated areas.

Jefferson Parish

Unified voice

- Coordinate parish, regional, and state planning processes.

Infrastructure (physical and governmental)

- Achieve state-of-the-art Category 5 (including 30-ft surge) protection.
- Co-locate permitting offices.
- Streamline processes for rebuilding.
- Police chief should be appointed by and responsible to the chief elected official.

Economic Growth

- Provide subsidized loans and grants for small businesses.
- Provide tax incentives for businesses.

Public Services

- Develop region-wide transportation alternatives.
- Raise public schools to top quartile by 2015.

Public Policies

- Aggressively enforce property maintenance codes.
- Create walking and biking friendly environments.

Planning and Design

- Use form-based codes in existing un-flooded mixed-use neighborhoods (existing can be grandfathered).

Southern Coastal Parishes**Unified voice**

- Foster collaborative environment that promotes robust interaction and regional planning.

Infrastructure (physical and governmental)

- One enforced building code for entire state.
- Underground utilities.
- Coastal restoration and protection for entire South Coast.

Economic Growth

- Lakefront development: convention, hotels, aquarium, recreation, tourist attractions and entertainment.
- Cameron Parish bridge to replace ferry.

Public Services

- Modernized schools: facilities, technology, community multi-use.

Planning and Design

- Development of mixed-income and cultural communities.

Baton Rouge/ Florida Parishes and Central/ Northern Parishes**Infrastructure (physical and governmental)**

- Mandate use of IBC building regulations on all structures, and develop innovative funding strategies to enable smart growth practices.

Economic Growth

- Louisiana should lead the effort to expand the nation's crisis counseling program to assist hurricane-impacted individuals with mental health issues to become productive and participate in our economic recovery.

Public Services

- Develop a comprehensive regional transit network including light rail, green corridors, and urban/rural public transportation with alternative fuel incentives.

Planning and Design

- As a receiving community, Baton Rouge should build model communities using smart growth principles (mixed-use/mixed-income).
- Involve and educate community about the recovery and rebuilding process, ensuring that local parish planning occurs in open, public forums with full participation of all citizens.

The Next Steps

At the request of the Authority's Director of Long Term Planning and its federal planning partner, the FEMA Long Term Community Recovery Team, the sponsoring organizations have formed a volunteer advisory group of professional organizations to assist with future planning efforts. The advisory group includes the conference sponsors (The American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation and the American Society of Civil Engineers) in addition to the Urban Land Institute, International Economic Development Council and the American Society of Landscape Architects. The advisory group will give federal, state and local planning authorities single point access to the extensive expertise and national communities of professional practice represented by these organizations.

The advisory group's first order of business is to recruit experienced professionals to provide volunteer assistance in the first round of parish planning meetings scheduled for December 10-13, 2005.

As a follow-up to the Louisiana Recovery and Rebuilding Conference, the Louisiana Recovery Authority has announced that it will assess recovery needs through a series of meetings within parishes. The Authority has set forth a long-term, parish-driven community planning process that includes in Phase One:

- Development of principles for urban, rural, and coastal planning for community livability and fairness.
- Integration of local, regional and statewide planning processes.
- Engagement of key stakeholder groups.
- Prevention and mitigation planning and action implementation against future disasters.
- Public forums to identify issues and priorities.
- Establishing guiding principles for the process and planning outcomes.

- Identification of long-term resources and funding sources for the planning and development process.
- Formation of parish teams identified by FEMA and the state as receiving either *multi-sector assistance*, *targeted assistance for high impact issues*, or *technical advice*.

Based upon the assessments in Phase One, Phase Two will proceed with:

- Implementation of the recommendations from the Phase One assessment process.
- Incorporation of the guiding principles into the long-range plan.
- Ongoing planning and implementation for the redevelopment process.

Conference sponsors and participants urge the Authority to unify, to the extent practicable, the multiple planning efforts now underway into a coordinated effort that can “speak with one voice” based on common planning principles and policy goals.

We urge the Authority to ensure that all recovery efforts in Louisiana – federal, state and local – fully embrace and embody the goals and principles presented in this report.

We hope that, from this starting point, all future planning efforts will be dedicated to building consensus through inclusive, participatory dialogue and action. We also hope that the spirit of transparency that characterized the deliberations of the Louisiana Recovery and Rebuilding Conference will be perpetuated. Diversity and fairness must be honored at every step of this process.

Out of adversity and tragedy – as we have witnessed again and again in our nation’s history – can come improvement and uplift. The wide road to a greater, more prosperous Louisiana lies ahead if, collectively, we have the wisdom and the courage to take it.

Glossary of Planning and Design Terms Used in Conference Deliberations

Equity:

All citizens have equal access to educational, economic development and cultural opportunities.

Form Based Code:

Set of design guidelines that bring together land use, zoning ordinances, and architectural form based on the needs of the community.

Green Design:

A design system created to produce energy efficient buildings and components, low in contaminant emissions, and with a significant use of eco-friendly and recyclable materials, etc., to facilitate livable communities.

Green Corridors:

Natural land preserved, including a diversity of wildlife and flora often with a transportation link between destinations.

Historic Preservation:

Protecting structures of historic and cultural importance.

Inclusionary Zoning:

Method used to create affordable housing units, community diversity and equity. Developers may be required or provided with incentives to develop a certain percentage of affordable housing units.

Land Use:

Manner of construction and activity the land is used for, e.g., commercial, open space, or residential purposes.

Master Plan:

Guidance plan for development and growth. Master plans typically cover a number of topics and vary in geographic scope from small neighborhoods to entire regions.

Main Street:

Community revitalization program begun by the National Trust for Historic Preservation focusing on preserving historic centers of communities.

Mixed-income:

Communities or developments that display a diverse range of wealth and common resources.

Mixed-use:

Development that has a combination of uses usually including a residential, retail, office and educational components on a single site.

Public/Private Partnership:

A collaboration that facilitates the participation of the private sector in public initiatives with innovative tools such as tax incentives, subsidies or the efficient private operation of community services.

Regional planning:

The collaboration and cooperation between parishes, and municipalities within parishes, in planning efforts to tackle common problems and to make the best use of available resources.

Smart Growth:

Policies aimed at reducing development “sprawl” patterns to create sustainable communities that minimize negative impacts on the natural environment.

Sustainable Development:

Developing communities and buildings in a manner that promotes environmental protection, energy conservation, public health, social equity and economic prosperity to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future.

Transit:

Means of transportation other than individual cars and trucks, including public transportation by train, bus, light rail, trolley or street car.

Walkable:

Applicable to a neighborhood area, usually defined by a half mile radius, that offers public amenities – stores, work places, residences, civic spaces, and entertainment – within walking distance.